



The Virginia Saltwater Review

*Plans and Statistics Department
2600 Washington Avenue, 3rd Floor
Newport News, VA 23607-0756
<http://www.mrc.virginia.gov>*

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by

Department of Plans and Statistics, Fisheries Management Division

OVERVIEW

In the news this week... wind, rain, and more rain, with a promise of sun. There were also some fish caught, and some crabs saved. There are numerous items to check out in this addition of the Virginia Saltwater Review. First and foremost, the fishing reports, and more of our reporting stations are open for business! Next are the blue crab conservation measures undertaken by the Commission this past Tuesday, April 22 (pages 6 and 7). Don't forget, recreational flounder and tautog rules have changed, so go to page 8 for the specific details. VMRC also needs your trophy striped bass catch reports starting May 1, using either the forms provided (pages 9 and 10), or going online and registering your catch (www.vasaltwaterjournal.com). Morningstar Marina at Gwynn's Island (formerly known as the Boatel) has been added on as a site for the Marine Sportfish Collection Project (page 11). And finally, the VMRC's biological sampling team will be collecting important information from fish at the following two tournaments. Come out and watch, or better yet, participate in the tournament and allow the team to measure and remove the otoliths from the fish, and receive a reward tee-shirt or hat!

The 2nd Annual Black Drum World Championship Fishing Tournament, May 16-18, Cape Charles, VA
The 13th Annual Hampton Creek Cobia Tournament, June 13-15, Hampton, VA

THE FISHING REPORTS

Note from the Editor and staff: There are still a few of our reporting stations that have yet to reopen for business this year, so our fishing reports may be limited until all of our contributors are back.

Chincoteague-

Donna at Captain Bob's reports hot flounder action! A citation flounder (7 pounds 2 ounces) was brought in by James Amos on the 18th. Most anglers have been fishing the Fingers and the Flats, but other hot spots include the Assateague Channel, south of the Assateague Bridge, and the area in front of Memorial Park. The new favorite bait has been Gulp Alive, however most long-time anglers are catching flounder with squid, minnow, and silversides. Double flounder rigs (pink is the hot color) are having the most success.

One undersized trout was also caught this week.

Wachapreague –

The Wachapreague Marina Flounder Tournament is on until this Sunday at 3:00 p.m. Staff reports that the flounder fishing has been really great. The top place fish, to date, weighed in at 7 pounds 7 ounces, with the second place fish weighing 7 pounds 5 ounces, and the third coming in at 7 pounds 2 ounces. Anglers are finding success throughout the area, and Drawing and Green Channels are favorite hot spots, as usual. Minnows and squid are the all around favored bait.

At Captain Zeds, The Hotel Wachapreague and Captain Zeds Spring Flounder Tournament is also in full swing. In first place, thus far, is John Eshleman with his 7-pound, 7-ounce flounder. With the tournament, staff reports weighing in numerous nice fish! Aside from Drawing and Green Channels, other hot spots have been Bulls Head and the Hammock. Most anglers are using squid and minnow or smelt for bait. Earlier this week, reports of nice tautog catches came in from charter boats and a few private trips.

Cape Charles -

Not a lot has changed since last week at Chris' Bait and Tackle. Flounder are still being landed from the seaside of the Eastern Shore near Oyster, and from the bayside, off of buoy 36 and at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Tautog have been spotted around the pilings of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and near the concrete ships. Staff has heard rumors of several black drum catches, but that should pick up soon with warming temperatures.

Ernie at Cherrystone Bait and Tackle reports little activity because campers have not yet arrived for the season. Around the area, however, flounder have been spotted around buoy 36. He has also heard reports of speckled trout near Oyster. Croaker and blue crabs have yet to arrive for the season, but fishing will pick up soon with warming temperatures.

Onancock –

According to Captain Wil, croaker have arrived in the creeks in various sizes. Attracting the croaker are the blue crabs that have also just arrived. While few boats are going out, some anglers have caught flounder, but with very few are keepers yet. A few puppy drum (juvenile red drum) have been reported, but Captain Wil is waiting for the black drum, which are expected to arrive soon.

Lower Bay/Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel –

Tautog was the catch of the week at Cobb's Marina. A citation tautog (9 pounds, 10 ounces) was caught by Micheal Clough at the 2nd island of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Staff also reported a few flounder catches in the area.

While fishing has been slow, the action is starting to pick up at Sunset Boating Center. When the weather permitted, there were a few anglers who had luck with dogfish.

Staff at Salt Ponds Marina also report slow fishing, possibly due to poor weather.

Ken Neill, reporting secretary for the Peninsula Anglers Club, contributed the following:

Some decent weather has allowed more anglers to get out and do some fishing. The fish were waiting for them. The run of big red drum is off to a good early start. The first fish were caught out of the Eastern Shore surf. Boats which have tried around the shoals at the mouth of the bay have met with good success on red drum up to 52 inches long. So far, no large black drum have been caught with recreational gear. Some smaller blacks have been caught out of the surf. The black drum bite should take off over the next 2 weeks. Flounder catches have been good on both the ocean and bay sides of the Eastern Shore. The mouth of Back River has also been a good flounder spot. Croaker are available in the rivers. The tautog bite is just on fire. Structures from the Cell on out to the Triangle Wrecks are producing good catches of tautog. More large black sea bass are showing up at the Triangle Wrecks and other structures about that far out. The offshore wrecks are covered up with jumbo black sea bass. Deep-droppers had a very good weekend on grouper, golden tilefish, and blueline tilefish. Some bluefin tuna have been encountered offshore. Off of the Outer Banks, dolphin fishing is very good with some tuna, wahoo, and billfish also being caught.

Dr. Julie Ball, IGFA International Representative for Virginia Beach, contributed the following:

The full moon, paired with rising water temperatures and recent northeasterly winds created a recipe for a decent early red drum bite along the lower Eastern Shore inlets, shoals, and barrier islands. Kevin Whitley, also known as Kayak Kevin, released a nice 48-inch red while kayaking along the barrier islands this week. This action should continue to improve over the next few weeks.

Another species has also joined in the spring procession. The docile black drum has graced Mid Atlantic waters, with the first reports of hook and line catches occurring within the upper Eastern Shore seaside inlets near Quinby. Most fish have been on the smallish side, but the bigger fish will show soon.

The flounder action has been spotty due to muddy conditions, but should improve as the waters clear. Although flatfish are available most anywhere in the lower bay, the best locations are still the Hump, the 1st and 3rd islands of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, and Oyster. Anglers are also hooking flatties up to 22-inches inside Lynnhaven River.

Rudee and Lynnhaven Inlets are still harboring puppy drum (juvenile red drum), with a few fish measuring up to 24-inches among a mixture of 2 to 3-pound snapper bluefish. Any lure or grub will connect with blitzing schools of snappers, but many anglers are also hooking nice speckled trout under the bluefish. Fishbites Extremes Paddle Tail lures are a good choice for finicky specks, with keepers ranging from 2 to 4 pounds also taking trolled lures.

Grey trout, croaker, and bluefish are hitting in Willoughby Bay and the Hampton Bar area, but the best croaker bite is still in the lower Bay rivers. The folks at Ocean's East 2 are reporting that dark-colored lures are working best for the greys right now. Big John at the Ocean View Fishing Pier boasts that the croaker bite improved over the last week, with most anglers filling coolers with fish to

about a pound. The best pier hardhead action is still taking off in the late evening, with bloodworms, shrimp, squid, and fishbites taking care of business. The sea mullet action is also on the rise, with most pier anglers leaving with a half-dozen or so fish pushing up to a pound.

With a weather break this week, anglers were able to reach their tautog holes outside of Bay waters for some overdue action. Remember that these popular wreck dwellers become off limits beginning on the 1st of May. Big fish are available on most inshore and offshore wrecks, where several nice tautog were pulled from the Brass Spike and the Tower Reef lately. The tautog scene within the Bay is still going strong, with excellent catches coming from the structure and pilings of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel and lower Bay wrecks. Anglers using fiddlers and blue crabs are experiencing steady action with nice fish. Hunter Gray of Chesapeake rounded out his tog season with a fat 11-pound, 9-ounce fish he enticed off the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel this week. Nice black sea bass are available on deepwater wrecks, where limits of big fish are the norm. These fish also starting to mingle closer to shore where fish to over 5-pounds are coming from structures within just a few miles from the coasts.

The blueline tilefish spectacle continues to lure boats over the 50-fathom curve to check out the big scene first hand. These fish are an easy target, with boats returning with good numbers of fish, but remember that anglers can keep seven tilefish per person. Several wreckfish, grouper, and golden tiles were also boated this week, with some of the golden tiles tipping the scales at 45-pounds.

Offshore action out of Carolina is good right now. Boats are also returning with yellowfin tuna and a few bluefin tuna. Wahoo and billfish are also available. For more information, go to www.drjball.com.

Virginia Middle Bay –

Fishing in the area has been hampered by the poor weather of the last week. However, Jett's Hardware did report that large striped bass were being caught further to the north, in Maryland. With the Virginia Trophy season set to start May 1, these catches are an encouraging sign.

Capt. Jim Thompson's main comment for the current fishing situation is that the water temperature will need to reach 68 degrees before the real fishing will turn on in his area. The water will probably warm to that point in early May.

Virginia Beach –

Fishing has picked up at the Virginia Beach Fishing Center. Puppy drum (juvenile red drum), bluefish, and speckled trout are being spotted in the inlet. Five citations were landed on the F/V RUDY ANGLER this weekend fishing at the Norfolk Canyon. The single black sea bass citation (5 pounds, 8 ounces) was landed by Paul Chatman, and four blueline tilefish citations were earned by Thomas Berger (16 pounds 2 ounces), Edward Rhule (15 pounds, 4 ounces), Phillip Hart (14 pound, 14 ounces), and Warren Jones (11 pounds even).

Staff at Fisherman's Wharf Marina have reported little action this week. A few anglers have brought in catches of tautog and black sea bass.

Virginia Piers –

The Ocean View Pier is now open 7 days a week (until 12 a.m. on weekends). Staff reports a large number of croaker in the evenings. Other catches include spot, kingfish, and bluefish.

Staff at the Virginia Beach Pier report little fishing action. Catches include mostly bluefish and a few skate.

Numerous bluefish are being spotted at the Sandbridge Pier. A few speckled trout have also been brought in over the past week.

Outer Banks, NC –

Fishing success rates have improved over the last week as water temperatures rose to 53 degrees in the Kill Devil Hills area. Hopefully, a more seasonable weather pattern is emerging to allow anglers more time to get out and fish.

Anglers fishing from the shore and the piers enjoyed a better week for fishing with speckled trout catches early in the mornings. Other denizens include puffers, bluefish, dogfish, and a few red drum in the evenings. The sounds and inlets, however, were not as productive with the scattered speckled trout and bluefish being the main targets. Striped bass were a rare catch as well.

Offshore fishing is improving—some anglers caught their limit of dolphin this weekend. Blackfin and yellowfin tuna are also being caught in good numbers with additional catches of wahoo, tilefish, black sea bass, and a 300-pound blue marlin.

The water has warmed up and so has the fishing south of the Oregon Inlet. Anglers are seeing a wide variety of fish being landed with bluefish, blowfish, and sea mullet north of Avon Pier. North and south of Cape Hatteras Point had good showings of blowfish, sea mullet, bluefish, puppy drum (juvenile red drum) and black drum.

Offshore fishing out of Hatteras Inlet showed a lot of promise as well for anglers when the weather cooperated. Dolphin were the catch of the day as well as a mix of amberjack, tuna wahoo and king mackerel. Anglers working the Pamlico Sound were mainly able to find bluefish.

If you have additional information or would like further details contact Joe Grist at (757) 247-2237.

Please credit the Virginia Marine Resources Commission's THE SALTWATER REVIEW as the source of the fishing information.

For immediate release
April 22, 2008

Contact: John M.R. Bull
757-247-2269 (office)
757-509-0969 (cell)

NEWPORT NEWS, VA. – Virginia fishery regulators have voted to cut the crab harvest by 34 percent this year, partly by abolishing the winter dredging of hibernating crabs and by closing the season for female crabs a month early.

A series of harvest restrictions passed Tuesday by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission were in an effort to shore up a Chesapeake Bay blue crab population that has been teetering on the edge of collapse for several years.

“The scientific data is overwhelming and without doubt identifies a problem that must be addressed decisively,” said VMRC Commissioner Steven G. Bowman. “To delay or to take half measures would be irresponsible.”

The latest Bay-wide crab population survey, released last week, shows the number of crabs dropped by 16.1 percent below the already dangerously low levels documented over the past decade.

The survey prompted Maryland to agree to a 34 percent cut in that state’s crab harvest, through measures to be enacted in the next few weeks. The governors of both states support the cutbacks.

The nine-member VMRC board led the way in voting Tuesday to:

- Eliminate Virginia’s winter dredge season for the 53 watermen licensed to participate in that fishery.
- Close the season for the taking of female crabs as of Oct. 27. The state’s crab pot season normally closes on Nov. 30.
- Abolish the recreational crab pot license, which allowed up to five pots per license holder. Current law allows Virginia residents to set up to two crab pots without a license.
- Reduce the number of crab pots and peeler pots permitted per license by 30 percent as of next year, and by 15 and 30 percent respectively this May. The number of pots currently allowed per license ranges from 100 to 500.
- Require two additional, wider crab pot escape rings -- known as cull rings -- as of July 1, except the seaside of the Eastern Shore. At that time, two cull rings in a crab pot must be $2 \frac{3}{8}$ ths of an inch in diameter, in addition to the currently required rings of $2 \frac{3}{16}$ ths and $2 \frac{5}{16}$ ths of an inch. This will allow larger crabs to escape.

The Commission also voted to summon any watermen convicted of two crab conservation violations in a one-year period before the board for a license revocation hearing.

Perhaps the most contentious of the regulations was the decision to the end the dredging of crabs in the winter.

Between half to three-quarters of the crabs dug out of the sand and mud in the winter are either cut up, smashed, or killed – just a few months before they emerge to spawn. Of the 300 comments received by VMRC in the past few months, a clear majority favored abolishing the wasteful winter dredge season.

The Commission formally asked for state assistance, if available, for crab dredgers who will be out of work this winter as a result of regulation changes.

The new harvest restrictions came on top of other VMRC regulation changes over the past two months aimed at protecting the blue crab, including:

- Prohibiting anyone else from entering the winter crab dredge season and capping the current

number of licensed dredgers at 53.

- Requiring both cull rings on crab pots to be open at all times. One had been allowed to be closed in certain locations.
- Increase the minimum size of peeler crabs from 3 inches to 3.25 inches until July 15 and then to 3.5 inches for the rest of the season. This matched Maryland's regulations.
- Allow only one other person to be authorized to work a waterman's crab pots, instead of the many that had been allowed.

Despite conservation measures taken by Virginia and Maryland over the past decade, and lowered crab harvest targets set year after year, the total Bay-wide harvest of crabs dropped from 89 million pounds in 1997 to 44 million pounds last year.

And still the abundance of crabs in the Chesapeake Bay remains 70 percent lower than population estimates in the early 1990s.

Water quality, oxygen dead zones, loss of underwater grass beds that shelter juvenile crabs likely played a role in the drastic reduction of the Bay's crab population.

But scientific data shows that overfishing has played a role as well.

Total crab harvest targets in Virginia have been exceeded in 12 of the past 16 years, and overfishing has cut into the species' ability to reproduce in eight of the past 11 years.

Because the crab's life cycle takes it from the ocean, through the lower Chesapeake Bay and into Maryland's waters, both states decided to work together to find a Bay-wide solution.

"We hope and expect that acting together we can turn this around," Bowman said. "The crab is resilient and a prolific breeder, and our actions should save the species and rebuild the population so that harvest levels for our watermen will return to where they should be."

SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE USE OF RECREATIONAL CRAB POTS

The Commission eliminated the 5-pot commercial license for recreational purposes, effective May 1, 2008. After May 1, 2008, no license to take crabs, by crab pot, for recreational or personal use, shall be issued, and any license purchased, prior to May 1, shall be null and void.

Section §28.2-226 of the Code of Virginia still provides an exemption for licensing requirements for the following activities:

1. Except as otherwise provided by regulation, taking by dip net, hand line, or two crab pots, as much as one bushel of hard crabs and two dozen peeler crabs in any one day for personal use only.

The Commission also deemed that statewide, except for the Seaside of Eastern Shore—by emergency Regulation, effective July 1, 2008, two 2 3/8-inch cull rings are required, in addition to the 2 5/16" and 2 3/16" cull rings that are already required. All 4 cull rings are to be open in any crab pot placed, set or fished in any tidal waters, except the Seaside of Eastern Shore where pots shall contain a 2 3/16" and 2 5/16" cull ring, both to be open.

Remember, buoys of any crab pot, used for recreational purposes, shall be marked with the licensee's last 4 numbers of his or her social security number or driver's license number, preceded by the letter "R". And you must follow all minimum size limits and season restrictions that apply to the commercial fishery, including, no harvest of female blue crabs beginning October 27 through December 31.

IMPORTANT RECREATIONAL REGULATION CHANGES TO REMEMBER FOR 2008

TAUTOG

[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-960-10 et seq.\]](#)

Minimum Size Limit.....14 inches
Possession Limit.....4 per person
Closed Season: May 1 through June 24



SUMMER FLOUNDER

[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-620-10 et seq.\]](#)

2008 Season OpensMarch 1
Closed Season.....July 21 through July 30
Minimum Size Limit.....19 inches
Possession Limit.....5 per person

The above flounder restrictions apply to Virginia tidal waters, except that in Virginia's Potomac River tributaries the minimum size limit, closed season, and possession limit will be the same as established by [PRFC](#) for the mainstem Potomac River.



2008 STRIPED BASS RECREATIONAL TROPHY REPORT

FORM

**THIS REPORT MUST BE FILLED OUT AND MAILED OR HAND
DELIVERED TO VMRC NO LATER THAN JUNE 30, 2008.**

Each fisherman, captain, or boat operator is responsible for complying with all restrictions and requirements contained in regulation 4VAC 20-252-10 ET SEQ. Regulation 4VAC 20-252-10 ET SEQ. requires all striped bass kept during the trophy season be reported.

**** This page is for summary purposes only ****

FISHING SEASONS: Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries--May 1 (12:01 AM) - June 15 (11:59 PM), 2008
Coastal Virginia waters--May 1 (12:01 AM) - May 15 (11:59 PM), 2008
Potomac River tributaries--April 19 (12:01 AM) - May 15 (11:59 PM), 2008

TROPHY POSSESSION SIZE: 32-inch minimum; except for Potomac River Tributaries, where there is a 28 minimum.

POSSESSION LIMIT: 1 trophy-size fish per person. When fishing from a boat or vessel, where the entire catch is held in a common hold or container, the possession limit shall be for the boat or vessel and shall be equal to the number of persons on board, legally eligible to fish, multiplied by the applicable personal possession limit. The captain or operator of the boat or vessel shall be responsible for any boat or vessel possession limit.

GEAR: Hook and Line fishing only

NO SALE OF HOOK & LINE CAUGHT STRIPED BASS

NO POSSESSION of Trophy striped bass in the spawning reaches (defined below) May 1 through June 15.

- James River - from a line connecting Dancing Point and New Sunken Meadow Creek upstream to a line connecting City Point and Packs Point.
- Pamunkey River - from the Route 33 Bridge at West Point upstream to a line connecting Liberty Hall and the opposite shore.
- Mattaponi River - from the Route 33 Bridge at West Point upstream to the Route 360 Bridge at Aylett.
- Rappahannock River - from the Route 360 Bridge at Tappahannock upstream to the Route 1 Bridge at Falmouth.
- Alteration of striped bass while aboard any boat or vessel or while fishing from shore or pier so that total length cannot be determined is prohibited.
- Spearing or gaffing or attempting to spear or gaff striped bass is prohibited.
- Transfer of any striped bass to another person while on the water or while fishing from a pier or shore is prohibited.
- Striped bass fishing is prohibited in Federal waters (beyond the Virginia three-mile limit line).

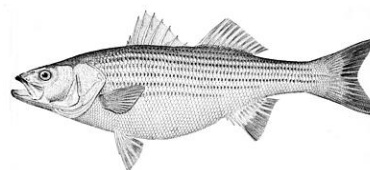
REPORT FORM HELPFUL HINTS:

- You must include length information on each trophy size striped bass that is kept.
- VMRC would appreciate any length information on striped bass that are released, please see the other side of this form.
- Lengths are total lengths in inches (to nearest 1/4 inch). Total length is measured in a straight line from tip of nose to tip of tail.
- Weights (in pounds) are optional
- TO REPORT REGULATION VIOLATIONS: 1-800-541-4646
- TROPHY REPORTING QUESTIONS: 1-800-937-9247

RETURN FORM TO:

**VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION
PLANS AND STATISTICS DEPARTMENT
2600 WASHINGTON AVENUE, 3RD FLOOR
NEWPORT NEWS VA 23607-0756**

On-line reporting is available:



www.vasaltwaterjournal.com

2008 RECREATIONAL TROPHY STRIPED BASS SEASON REPORT FORM

PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION

NAME: _____

(USE AS MANY FORMS AS NECESSARY)

DATE	WATER BODY WHERE FISH WERE CAUGHT	NUMBER OF STRIPED BASS CAUGHT	NUMBER OF STRIPED BASS KEPT

[illegible]













ATTENTION SALTWATER ANGLERS! **THE VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES** **COMMISSION WANTS YOUR FISH....** **TO MEASURE AND AGE**



You catch it, you fillet it, but instead of throwing the remains in the trash, please donate them to science.

Website: http://mrc.virginia.gov/rec_assessment/index.shtm

The Marine Sportfish Collection Project will focus on species of fish that are difficult to collect through the agency's normal sampling program. Anglers are asked to donate their filleted carcasses (head and tail intact) of legal and fresh-caught:

COBIA		RED DRUM	
SHEEPSHEAD		BLACK DRUM	
SPADEFISH		TAUTOG	
TILEFISH		GROUPER	
KING MACKEREL		BLUEFISH (OVER 16 POUNDS OR 36 INCHES)	

In return for participating in the project, the agency will provide a **FREE PROJECT TEE SHIRT or HAT FOR EACH PARTICIPANT.**

Please visit these bait and tackle merchants to participate:

Bell Isle Marine (Hampton)

Chris' Bait and Tackle (Capeville)

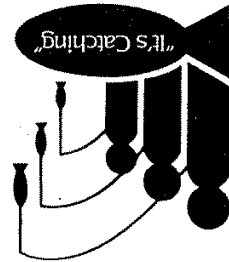
Long Bay Pointe Marina (Virginia Beach)

Morningstar Marina – Gwynn's Island (formerly known as the Gwynn's Island Boatel)

As of 04/18/2008

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2600 WASHINGTON AVE., 3RD FLOOR
NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA 23607

Practice

CAREFUL CATCH

REDUCE STRESS FACTORS THAT KILL FISH

Exhaustion * Loss of Slime * Wounds * Time out of Water